

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9419
INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 1045

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, CE

SUBJ: UNP TO CHOOSE NEW PARTY PRESIDENT

1. UNP WORKING COMMITTEE SCHEDULED MEET 26 APRIL TO SELECT NEW PARTY PRESIDENT FOLLOWING DEATH OF DUDLEY SENANAYAKE. WIDELY EXPECTED THAT OPPOSITION LEADER KND UNP GENSEC J. R. JAYEWARDENE WILL BE UNANIMOUS CHOICE. HIS SELECTION REPRESENTS COMPROMISE FOR WHAT REMAINS BADLY DIVIDED PARTY. JAYEWARDENE STILL BEARS LEGACY OF UNP RESENTMENT AT HIS EFFORTS LAST YEAR TO NEGOTIATE COALITION OF PARTY WITH UNITED FRONT IN FRAMEWORK OF " NATIONAL GOVERNMENT" AS SOLUTION TO COUNTRY' S PROBLEMS. OTHER POSSIBLE RIVALS TO J. R. INCLUDE FORMER AGRICULTURE MIN M. D. BANDA, AN ACTIVE " OLD GUARD" BACKSTAGE MANEUVERER BUT WITH BURDEN OF DEFEAT IN 70, AND " YOUNG TURK" M. P., R. PREMADASA, WHO TOTALLY UNACCEPTABLE TO PARTY ESTABLISHMENT.

2. J. R. ANXIOUS TO OBTAIN NEW POST AFTER THREE DECADES IN DUDLEY' S SHADOW, AND DUDLEY SENANAYAKE- NOMINATED WORKING COMMITTEE REPORTEDLY HAS DEMANDED AS ITS PRICE PUBLIC PLEDGE FROM JAYEWARDENE TO CONTINUE ADHERENCE TO DUDLEY LINE AND TO LEAD UNP AS GENUINE OPPOSITION PARTY. IN ANY EVENT, J. R. ' S POST TECHNICALLY WILL BE INTERIM UNTIL CONFIRMED BY PARTY CONGRESS. LATTER HAS BEEN LONG DELAYED AND CAN BE CALLED
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AT SHORT NOTICE, WITH THREAT OF POSSIBLE REPUDIATION SEEN
BY PARTY REGULARS AS KEEPING J. R. IN LINE.

3. POLITICAL HISTORY OF CEYLON SINCE INDEPENDENCE IN 1948
HAS BASICALLY BEEN STRUGGLE BETWEEN TWO FAMILIES, BANDARANAIAKES
AND SEYANAYAKES, TO CONTROL COUNTRY. EFFORTS NOW REPORTEDLY
BEING MADE BY SENANAYAKE FAMILY, HEADED BY DUDLEY'S BROTHER
ROBERT, TO MAINTAIN UNP CONTROL AND POSSIBLY GROOM ONE OF
ROBERT'S THREE SONS FOR FUTURE ROLE IN POLITICS, MUCH AS
PM BANDARANAIAKE HAS APPARENTLY SOUGHT TO GROOM HER
SON ANURA. SELECTION OF J. R. TO HEAD PARTY FOR MOMENT APPEARS
LIKELY BUT "OLD GUARD" MEANS TO KEEP STRING ON HIM AND CHECK
ANY TENDENCY TO SLIDE BACK INTO PREVIOUS THOUGHTS OF COALITION
WITH MRS B.

4. UNPRECEDENTED SCALE OF POPULAR MOURNING FOR DUDLEY (COLOMBO
(1021) HAS ENORMOUSLY BUOYED UP UNP CONFIDENCE. OUTPOURING
OF SENTIMENT, PRESENCE OF LARGE CROWDS OF MOURNERS STREAMING
PAST DUDLEY'S BIER AND AT FUNERAL, INCLUDING MANY HUNDREDS OF
THOUSANDS OF VILLAGERS, ARE INTERPRETED BY PRO AND ANTI- UFG
OPINION ALIKE AS REFLECTING DEEP DISSATISFACTION WITH GSL'S
ECONOMIC POLICIES. UNP IS IMMEDIATE BENEFICIARY OF THIS MOOD.

5. UNP HAS NOW CANCELLED PREVIOUS PLANS FOR ITS MAY DAY CELEBRATIONS,
NOMINALLY OUT OF RESPECT FOR DUDLEY, BUT REPORTEDLY
TO UNDERLINE CONTRAST BETWEEN WHATEVER TURNOUT OF PARTIES CAN
MUSTER ON GALLE FACE GREEN ON MAY 1 AND DUDLEY SENANAYAKE
FUNERAL.

BYRNE

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